CLAIMS:

Having thus described our invention, what we claim as new, and desire to secure by Letters Patent is

1. A method for conducting an online multi-speaker presentation comprising the steps of:

receiving a presentation agenda that specifies a plurality of phases, each phase having a speaker for presenting in a pre-specified order; said agenda including a policy for coordinating data feeds to one or more client devices according to an activated phase;

controlling data feed configurations associated with each phase by activating data feed controls at times associated with an active agenda phase policy; and,

broadcasting data content from said feeds associated with a current phase to one or more connected client devices, whereby many users of the on-line meeting participate according to feed policies specified by said agenda without users at the client devices having to explicitly select or coordinate the feed controls during the presentation.

2. The method as claimed in Claim 1, further including repeating steps of b) – c) for each successively activated phase until said agenda terminates.

3. The method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said data feeds comprise data audio and video feeds, said step of controlling data feed configurations associated with each phase further comprises the steps of:

checking a current agenda-phase policy; and,

combining data feeds as specified according to said current agenda-phase policy prior to broadcasting a resulting composite video and/or audio to applicable clients, whereby data feed controls are automatically activated according to an agenda phase policy associated with a new phase activation

4. The method as claimed in Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

generating a graphic representation of the instant state of the presentation, whereby the graphic representation includes a depiction of a current phase; and,

forwarding said representation to active users at said one or more client devices, each said one or more client devices adapted for receiving and displaying said graphic representation.

5. The method as claimed in Claim 4, further comprising the step of: selecting a new phase whereby the selection is made via said graphical representation provided at that user's client device.

6. The method as claimed in Claim 4, further including steps of:

determining a current active presentation state; and,

updating the graphical representation depicted according to said determined state and broadcasting a latest graphical representation to active users.

7. The method as claimed in Claim 3, further comprising the step of: receiving a user control request to join an on-line multi-speaker presentation or exit said multi-speaker presentation, and, automatically activating or deactivating an audio or video feed for said user accordingly.

8. The method as claimed in Claim 3, further comprising the step of: receiving a user control request to change the presentation's phase to a next phase in the agenda

9. The method as claimed in Claim 3, further comprising the step of: receiving a user control request to create a new multi-speaker presentation instance including specification of the presentation's agenda.

10. The method as claimed in Claim 3, further including the step of: enabling a current speaker to call on another active user who has requested to ask a question, whereby calling on another active user includes activating that user's audio feed.

11. The method as claimed in Claim 10, wherein said step of calling on another active user includes the step of switching a shared screen to that another user's client device.

12. The method as claimed in Claim 3, wherein said step of controlling data feed configurations further includes the step of accepting connections from speakers and spectators requesting to participate in said presentation.

13. The method as claimed in Claim 1, further comprising: a step of authenticating speakers requesting to participate in said on-line meeting, said step of authenticating comprising the step of determining whether a given user can connect to the presentation.

14. The method as claimed in Claim 13, further including the step of providing at least one user with broadcast rights, and enabling a user to take away one or more said broadcast rights.

15. The method as claimed in Claim 13, wherein said authenticating comprises a step of implementing presentation access control in the form of an ID or password is given to a user.

16. An online multi-speaker presentation system comprising:

means for receiving a presentation agenda that includes a plurality of phases, each phase having an associated speaker, said agenda phase including a policy for coordinating data feeds to one or more clients at each phase;

a means for implementing data feed configurations to one or more clients in accordance with said agenda phase policy, and reconfiguring data feeds upon activation of a new phase, wherein a plurality of speakers of the on-line meeting participate according to feed policies specified by said agenda.

17. The online multi-speaker presentation system according to claim 16, further comprising a means for determining a current speaker and reconfiguring said data feeds according to an agenda phase specification of the current speaker.

18. The online multi-speaker presentation system according to claim 17, further comprising:

a communications network having a plurality of client devices connected thereto; and

a server means connected to said network for implementing said data feed configurations to one or more clients in accordance with said agenda phase policy, wherein said feed policies are triggered automatically without any client devices having to explicitly select or coordinate the feed controls during the presentation.

19. The online multi-speaker presentation system according to claim 18, wherein said data feeds are configured to communicate audio, video or combined audio and video data, said system including broadcast means for providing said audio or video or combined audio and video data associated with a phase to one or more connected client devices.

20. The online multi-speaker presentation system according to claim 19, wherein server means connected to said network further includes means for receiving data feeds from a client or data

source, checking a current agenda-phase policy, and combining the feeds as is specified, said broadcast means transmitting a resulting composite image and/or audio to the applicable clients.

21. The online multi-speaker presentation system according to claim 18, wherein an agenda-phase policy specifies a data feed from a non-speaker-related data source be broadcast to one or more clients.

22. The online multi-speaker presentation system according to claim 21, wherein a non-speaker related data source includes web-accessible streaming video or streaming audio.

23. The online multi-speaker presentation system according to claim 21, wherein said agenda is implemented as a text file or as an instance of a software object.

24. The online multi-speaker presentation system according to claim 21, wherein said phases, speakers and feed policies of said agenda determined and specified at some point in time prior to commencement of said on-line meeting.

25. The online multi-speaker presentation system according to claim 21, further comprising: means for generating a graphic representation of the instant state of the presentation, whereby the graphic representation includes a depiction of a current phase, said server means forwarding said representation to active users at said one or more client devices adapted for receiving and displaying said graphic representation.

26. An on-line service for enabling multi-speaker presentations comprising

a communications network having a plurality of attached client devices adapted to receive broadcast presentations;

means connected to said communications network for receiving a presentation agenda that includes a plurality of phases, each phase having an associated speaker, said agenda phase including a policy for coordinating data feeds to one or more client devices at each phase for participating in said meeting; and,

a means for implementing data feed configurations to one or more clients in accordance with said agenda phase policy, and reconfiguring data feeds upon activation of a new phase, wherein said feed policies are triggered automatically without users at said clients devices having to explicitly select or coordinate the feed controls during the presentation.

27. The online service according to claim 26, further comprising means for receiving user control requests for participating in an on-line presentation, a user control request to change the presentation's phase to a next phase in the agenda.

28. The online service according to claim 27, wherein a user control request received is a request to create a new multi-speaker presentation instance including specification of the presentation's agenda.

29. The online service according to claim 28, wherein a user control request received is a request to join a multi-speaker presentation or exit said multi-speaker presentation, said implementing means enabling said requesting user to have an audio or video feed activated.

30. The online service according to claim 28, wherein said feed policy includes broadcast rights, said service varying a users rights based on a agenda policy.

31. The online service according to claim 30, further comprising:

means for depicting the state of the presentation instance according to a graphical representation for presentation to said clients, said graphical representation adapted for indicating a current phase of said presentation; and,

means for determining a current active presentation state and updating the graphical representation depicted according to said determined state and broadcasting a latest graphical representation to active users.

32. The online service according to claim 31, further comprising means enabling a user to select a current phase via said graphical representation.

33. The online service according to claim 30, wherein said means for implementing data feed configurations to one or more clients further accepts data feed connections from speakers and spectators viewing said presentation.

34. The online service according to claim 30, wherein said means for implementing data feed configurations to one or more clients further includes means enabling an active user to give control of a currently active screen to another user.

35. A program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform method steps for method for conducting an online multi-speaker presentation, said method steps comprising:

receiving a presentation agenda that specifies a plurality of phases, each phase having a speaker for presenting in a pre-specified order; said agenda including policy for coordinating data feeds to one or more client devices according to an activated phase;

controlling data feed configurations associated with each phase by activating data feed controls at times associated with an active agenda phase policy; and,

broadcasting data content from said feeds associated with a current phase to one or more connected client devices, whereby many users of the on-line meeting participate according to feed policies specified by said agenda without users at the client devices having to explicitly select or coordinate the feed controls during the presentation.

36. The program storage device readable by a machine as claimed in Claim 35, further including repeating steps of b) – c) for each successively activated phase until said agenda terminates.

37. The program storage device readable by a machine as claimed in Claim 35, wherein said data feeds comprise data audio and video feeds, said step of controlling data feed configurations associated with each phase further comprises the steps of:

checking a current agenda-phase policy; and,

combining data feeds as specified according to said current agenda-phase policy prior to broadcasting a resulting composite video and/or audio to applicable clients, whereby data feed controls are automatically activated according to an agenda phase policy associated with a new phase activation

38. The program storage device readable by a machine as claimed in Claim 35, further comprising the steps of:

generating a graphic representation of the instant state of the presentation, whereby the graphic representation includes a depiction of a current phase; and,

forwarding said representation to active users at said one or more client devices, each said one or more client devices adapted for receiving and displaying said graphic representation.

39. The program storage device readable by a machine as claimed in Claim 38, further comprising the step of: selecting a new phase whereby the selection is made via said graphical representation provided at that user's client device.

40. The program storage device readable by a machine as claimed in Claim 38, further including steps of:

determining a current active presentation state; and,

updating the graphical representation depicted according to said determined state and broadcasting a latest graphical representation to active users.

41. The program storage device readable by a machine as claimed in Claim 37, further comprising the step of: receiving a user control request to join an on-line multi-speaker presentation or exit said multi-speaker presentation, and, automatically activating or deactivating an audio or video feed for said user accordingly.

42. The program storage device readable by a machine as claimed in Claim 37, further comprising the step of: receiving a user control a user control request to change the presentation's phase to a next phase in the agenda

43. The program storage device readable by a machine as claimed in Claim 37, further comprising the step of: receiving a user control request to create a new multi-speaker presentation instance including specification of the presentation's agenda.

44. The program storage device readable by a machine as claimed in Claim 37, further including the step of: enabling a current speaker to call on another active user who has requested to ask a question, whereby calling on another active user includes activating that user's audio feed.